The Time of Affect, or Bearing Witness to Life

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Upon entering the gallery, you catch sight of three wall-mounted plasma monitors, placed side-by-side, on which are displayed the faces of three middle-aged individuals: a woman on each side and in the middle, a man (fig. 1). You gradually approach this grouping of monitors until you are several feet away; you plant your feet and focus in on the face on the left, that of an Asian woman (fig. 2). You look intently at this image for perhaps a minute or so; as far as you can tell the face shows signs of some neutral emotional state, as if the woman, not quite certain of what she is looking at (is it meant to be you?), were struggling to get a fix on it. More striking than the expression itself, however, is the fact that it doesn't seem to be changing in any way, and, indeed, you find yourself hard-pressed to perceive any movement whatsoever in this allegedly moving image. Somewhat befuddled, you step about a foot to the right and fix on the white, unshaven, slightly graying, male face in the middle. Like the woman you just encountered, this face displays a neutral expression; yet, in this case, it is one that indicates reflection about something personal and a certain obliviousness to its surroundings (fig. 3). Again, however, having registered the significance of the expression, you are struck by the odd stasis of the image; though it is clearly moving in time, as the occasional blink or twitch betrays, you can discern no other significant movement or change in the facial expression. Stepping still another foot to your right, you now fix on the second female face, a white, curly-haired woman (fig. 4). Not surprisingly, you undergo a similar experience, though this time you pay less attention to the neutral expression itself, to the woman's sideways glance and slightly pursed lips, and focus your attention on discerning even the slightest hint of change in the image. After intense concentration over the span of several minutes,

FIGURE 1. Bill Viola, *Anima*, 2000 (color video triptych on three LCD flat panels, 161/4″ x 75″ x 2″). Eighty-two-minute digital video depicting imperceptibly minute changes in facial affect on three close-up images. From *Bill Viola: The Passions*, p. 268.
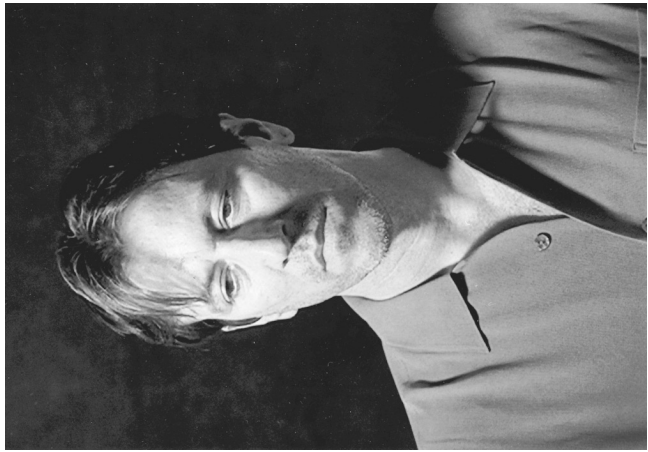
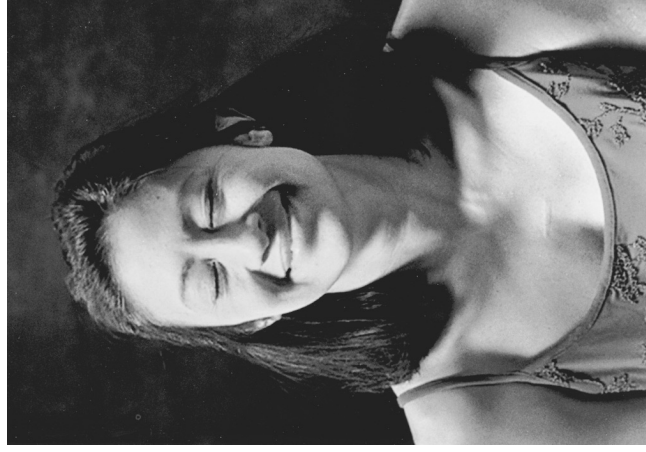FIGURES 2–4. Bill Viola, *Anima*, close-ups. From *Bill Viola*, pp. 80–81.

you find the same odd stasis that you discovered in the other two facial images: while the image is clearly moving, as again occasional physiological actions like blinking and twitching serve to indicate, the facial expression itself does not seem to change or evolve in any discernible way. Still befuddled, you move on.

When, somewhat later, you return to these three monitors, you are greatly surprised to discover radically changed expressions on the same three faces. The man is in the depths of sorrow, mouth curved downward, eyes wet and squinting, face tensed (fig. 5). The woman with curly hair seems to be in a state of shock, as if she were looking at something spine-chilling; her eyes are wide open, her eyebrows are raised, her mouth is drooping, her shoulders are arched, and the tendons in her neck stand taut (fig. 6). Finally, the woman on the left is in a state of inward bliss, with her closed mouth in a wide smile, her cheeks scrunched and puffy, eyes clenched tight, and shoulders inclined inward (fig. 7). Concentrating on each facial expression in turn, you again find the images completely static, allowing not even the faintest trace of change to be perceived.

It slowly dawns on you that what you are standing in front of are images portraying emotional vicissitudes of life that, paradoxically, remain imperceptible to your eye. Consulting the description of this artwork, *Anima* (2000), by the video artist Bill Viola, you immediately fathom the cause of this imperceptibility: these images portraying the passage among the four primary emotions of joy, sorrow, anger, and fear have been so radically slowed down that they are in effect still images; originally lasting about a minute of recorded time, the movements have been extended to last eighty-one minutes in playback time. So what you have in fact encountered in this work is the rich texture of the microstages *in between* recognizable or discrete emotional states. Normally imperceptible because they happen too fast for the eye to register (at least with any capacity for cognitive reflection), here these interstitial microstages of affectivity are imperceptible because they happen too slowly; in these effectively static images, you simply cannot perceive the incremental series of changes filling the unmarked continuum between discrete emotional states as anything like a continuity.

Armed with this knowledge, you resolve to watch the image sequences for a longer span of time, allowing yourself simply to absorb them in a re-

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FIGURES 5–7. Bill Viola, *Anima*, close-ups. From *Bill Viola*, pp. 83, 85, 82.

laxed mode without trying to identify changes or link images together in a cognitively coherent manner. This time, though you have no further success in perceiving the images as a distinct, evolving progression, you do discover that the experience of simply watching them has left you deeply moved, with a feeling that you've lived through something quite intense, even if oddly unidentifiable.

Let me posit this experience as an instance in which self-affection—long identified by Western philosophy as constituting the very content of that elusive experience we call subjectivity—undergoes a technical expansion. By opening the imperceptible in-between of emotional states, what I shall hereafter call affectivity, to some kind of embodied yet intentional apprehension, Viola's *Anima* exemplifies the capacity of new media to broker a technical enlargement of the threshold of the now, to intensify the body's subject-constituting experience of its own vitality, or, borrowing terminology from Maurice Merleau-Ponty (to whom I return below), to expand "the thickness of the pre-objective present" that comprises the very ground for experience as such.[1] In this paper, I propose to explore the technical expansion of self-affection as it has been variantly configured in recent new media art and cultural theory. As we shall see, what is at stake in such expansion is the givenness of time itself, that is, the content of self-affection. Insofar as new media art invests in the bodily experience of affectivity, intensifying it and enlarging its scope, it might be said to embody time consciousness and, indeed, to embody the being of time itself. Following along this shift from abstract time consciousness to embodied affectivity, we will find ourselves in a position to fathom the apparent paradox of contemporary subjectivity: the fact that technical expansion of self-affection allows for a fuller and more intense experience of subjectivity, that, in short, technology allows for a closer relationship to ourselves, for a more intimate experience of the very vitality that forms the core of our being, our constitutive incompleteness, our mortal finitude.

From Image to Body

To begin to grasp the originality of Viola's—and, more generally, new media art's—configuration of image, time, and body, let us invoke the concept of the time-image, as it has been theorized by Gilles Deleuze. According to Deleuze, the time-image characterizes cinema once it acquired the capacity to present direct images of time by displacing a totalizing aesthetic of the whole in favor of an opening to the outside. In the classical cinema,

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1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (London, 1962), p. 433; hereafter abbreviated as *PP.*

the open merged with the indirect representation of time: everywhere where there was movement, there was a changing whole open somewhere, in time. This was why the cinematographic image essentially had an out-of-field which referred on the one hand to an external world which was actualizable in other images, on the other hand to a changing whole which was expressed in the set of associated images. . . . When we say "the whole is the outside," the point is quite different. In the first place, the question is no longer that of the association or attraction of images. What counts is on the contrary the *interstice* between images, between two images: a spacing which means that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it. . . . The whole undergoes a mutation, because it has ceased to be the One-Being, in order to become the constitutive "and" of things, the constitutive between-two of images.[2]

The time-image involves an opening of the image to something not only outside the frame but outside the whole set of images that can potentially be framed. That is why the time-image must be situated "between images"; only by opening an outside, an *interstice,* between two images can cinema present a direct image of time.

As I have shown elsewhere, Deleuze's concept of the time-image marks the culmination of a logic of disembodiment.[3] Whereas the movement-image of the classical cinema enacts a certain generalization of Henri Bergson's understanding of the body as a "center of indetermination" within a "universe of images," one in which the frame of the camera replaces (and displaces) the body as the agent of selection, in the case of the time-image even the residual analogy linking the camera to the body is suspended.[4] Here the direct image of time is made possible precisely by a complete disembodiment; as the incompossible copresence of variant virtual series of images opened by the *interstice* or irrational cut between two images, time becomes available for an experience that is and can only be one of pure thinking.

In contrast to such a cognitive grasp of time, what Viola's configuration of time, image, and body proposes is precisely the irreducibility, as well as the privilege, of bodily mediation in the experience of time as self-affection (subjectivity). To set the stage for a fuller analysis of Viola's recent work, let

2. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 179–80.

3. See Mark Hansen, "Affect as Medium, or the 'Digital-Facial-Image,'" *Journal of Visual Culture* 2 (Aug. 2003): 205–28 and, more generally, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), chap. 5 and esp. chap. 7, the conclusions of which this essay builds upon and expands.

4. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York, 1991), p. 36.

us briefly examine the work of another contemporary media artist who more directly engages with the concept of the interstice or the "between-two of images" and who, consequently, can serve as a kind of mediator between Deleuze's aesthetic and Viola's, where nothing less is at stake than the dissolution of the between-two of *images* and its replacement by a between-two of *emotions* or, better, by affectivity as the very medium of the between.

In various works including *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1996), *Through a Looking Glass* (1999), *left is right and right is wrong and left is wrong and right is right* (1999), *Déjà Vu* (2000), and *5 Year Drive-By* (1995–2000), Scottish artist Douglas Gordon engages with issues of cinematic time, the time-image, and specifically the interstice or between-two of images. Moreover, Gordon excavates the temporal dimension of cinema through a practice that is specific to video as the privileged mode through which images, as the very material basis of contemporary perception, are actually lived or experienced. Gordon's essays and interviews repeatedly emphasize this aspect of video. Again and again he insists that video time—the time of slow-motion, freeze-framing, and repetition—is the given time of his generation. Having grown up with the video recorder, this generation "has lived a different relation to the cinema," one in which video slow motion and freeze-framing function less as analytical techniques (as they were to an earlier generation of film scholars) than as instruments of desire: "With the arrival of the VCR," Gordon recounts, we lived a "different film culture, a replay culture, and a slow-motion take on things."[5]

Consider Gordon's account of the seminal moment in his apprenticeship as an artist, the genesis of *24 Hour Psycho:*

> In 1992 I had gone home to see my family for Christmas and I was looking at a video of the TV transmission of *Psycho.* And in the part where Norman (Anthony Perkins) lifts up the painting of *Suzanna and the Elders* and you see the close-up of his eye looking through the peep-hole at Marion (Janet Leigh) undressing, I thought I saw her unhooking her bra. I didn't remember seeing that in the VCR version and thought it was strange, in terms of censorship, that more would be shown on TV than in the video, so I looked at that bit with the freeze-frame button, to see if it was really there.[6]

This experience of the discordance between the TV and video versions of the film left Gordon with an overwhelming sense that there is more there

5. Quoted in Leslie Camhi, "Very Visible . . . and Impossible to Find," *ARTNews* 98 (Summer 1999): 144.

6. Quoted in Amy Taubin, "Douglas Gordon," in *Spellbound: Art and Film,* ed. Philip Dodd (London, 1996), p. 70.

than meets the eye, that the flow of images itself—and, specifically, the space between images—contains a wealth of information not directly presented by a given viewing apparatus. The result, of course, is Gordon's monumental 1993 work, *24 Hour Psycho,* the work that marked his appearance on the international art stage. In *24 Hour Psycho,* Gordon treats Hitchcock's film as a piece of found footage that he reframes through technical modification and institutional displacement, slowing down its projection speed to two frames a second (instead of twenty-four) and presenting it in the space of an installation where the viewer-participant is encouraged to walk around what is in fact a double-sided image of the film projected on an elevated screen.

The effect of this radically decelerated and decontextualized presentation of Hitchcock's most familiar film is an eerie experience of protracted anticipation as well as a sobering insight into temporal relativity. Because the time any viewer has to devote to *24 Hour Psycho* is limited (in the extreme case, to the opening hours of a museum or gallery), his or her capacity to perceive the work is itself severely constrained (no perception of the whole film being possible) and radically dependent on where precisely the film is in its progression when he or she enters to watch it. More significantly still, these twin lessons concerning the intrinsic excess of given time are brought home to the viewer through the dynamics of affective anticipation. Because the image changes only once every twelve seconds, viewers quickly find their attention intensely concentrated on anticipating this moment of change. Gordon's technical modifications of cinema are, in other words, designed specifically to induce particular physiological effects. In various ways, his works submit their audiences to experimentations that call into play—and thus call attention to—the body's crucial role in mediating the interstice or between-two of images.[7] Accordingly, the time-image Gordon foregrounds is one that must be said to occur in the act of reception and, more specifically, in the concrete activity performed by the embodied

7. Gordon's most important strategies for calling the body into play include: (1) temporal deceleration (central to *24 Hour Psycho* as well as *5 Year Drive-By,* a public projection of *The Searchers* over a five-year period); (2) foregrounding the moment of perceptual shift (as in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner,* where inverted negative images of Dr. Jekyll's transformation into Mr. Hyde are set into a perpetual loop); (3) mirroring with slight temporal discordance (as in *Through the Looking Glass,* where slightly diverging twin images of the scene from *Taxi Driver* featuring Robert DeNiro pulling a gun and speaking to himself in a mirror are placed on opposite walls of a gallery); (4) exposing perceptual shift as the very texture of perception (as in *left is right and right is wrong and left is wrong and right is right* where Otto Preminger's obscure 1949 film noir, *Whirlpool,* is projected on two screens, one of which presents every odd frame of the film and the other every even frame); and (5) catalyzing the relativization of time within the viewer's body (as in *Déjà Vu,* where three projections of *DOA,* at respectively 23 fps, 24 fps, and 25 fps, are placed one beside the other).

viewer-participant as he or she grapples with the specific problematic staged in the various works.

Contrasted with Deleuze's conception, Gordon's work thus relocates the time-image from a purely mental space contained, as it were, within or between the formal linkages of a film to an embodied negotiation with the interstice or between-two of images that necessarily takes place through the affective experience of each specific viewer-participant. For this reason, Gordon's work exposes the fundamental limitation of Deleuze's conception of the cinema of the brain: the isomorphism between the cinema of the time-image and the contemporary brain. To understand how cinema has changed, Deleuze has argued, one must look to the modern revolution in brain science: "Intellectual cinema has changed, not because it has become more concrete (it was so from the outset), but because there has been a simultaneous change in our conception of the brain and our relationship with the brain."[8] Whereas Eisenstein's intellectual cinema, focused as it is on the sensorimotor production of dialectical concepts, correlates with an understanding of the brain in terms of integration and association, that of Alain Resnais cannot be understood apart from new orientations in cerebral processes, what Deleuze elsewhere calls the indeterminate brain.[9] Yet, in the end, Deleuze's postulation of an isomorphism between cinema and brain remains disturbingly one-sided; despite its crucial role in opening new possibilities for cinema, the brain on this account comprises nothing more than the passive object of a cinematic inscription. That is why Deleuze's claim that new circuits in the cinema must generate new cerebral circuits in effect repudiates the very cognitive revolution on which it claims to draw. His assertion of a *direct* transmission of the force of time into thought contradicts the current consensus in neuroscientific research that thinking is constructive and emergent and that it encompasses richly embodied processes of autopoietic self-organization.[10] Gordon's work—and the branch of new media art for which it here stands—contests Deleuze's model of the time-image precisely by questioning such a direct transmission of time into experience. By producing the time-image as/in the viewer-participant's richly

8. Deleuze, *Cinema 2,* p. 210.

9. See Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?,* trans. Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York, 1994).

10. See Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994) and *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York, 1999); Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York, 1996); Gerald Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (New York, 1992); and especially Francisco J. Varela, *Principles of Biological Autonomy* (New York, 1979) and Varela, Eleanor Rosch, and Evan Thompson, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

embodied physiological response to the interstice or between-two of images, Gordon's work challenges not simply the abstract isomorphism central to Deleuze's model of the modern cinema but also the model of the brain as irrational, indeterminate, and beyond the sensorimotor.

Technicity

Notwithstanding its importance as a reembodiment of the circuit linking time and image, Gordon's excavation of the space between two images remains constrained by its continued investment in the very media frame it so effectively undermines. Because Gordon approaches cinema as found footage, as already constituted raw material for his manipulations, his aesthetic is focused on the pole of playback and not on that of recording. Thus, despite the radical modifications to which he submits the given cinematic object (Hitchcock's *Psycho* in the case of *24 Hour Psycho*), Gordon in effect ratifies the cinematic model of registration. Simply put, he starts from the givenness of cinematic time, "reality" reproduced at twenty-four frames per second, and the critical function of his work retains a necessary reference to the system of *perceptual* illusion that is cinema. Now this model is precisely what gets called into question in Viola's recent work, where what is at stake is not the manipulation of an already constituted sequence of images but rather a coordinated modification of both recording and playback that functions to suspend the givenness of cinematic time. By exploiting the technical capacity, introduced by digitization, to shoot film at high speed and then, following its conversion to digital video, to project it seamlessly at normal speed, Viola is able to supersaturate the image, registering an overabundance of affective information normally unavailable to perception. As a result, his work manages to reorient the cinematic system in a fundamental way. Rather than continuing, with Gordon, to invest the image, that is, the between-two of images, as the space for the entry of affection into cinema, Viola retools the image as a support for the registration of affective microperceptions, effectively subordinating it and the entire perceptual regime of cinema to the intensive, embodied sensation of self-affection. This fundamental reorientation of the cinematic system, this inversion of the hierarchy between image and affectivity, accounts for Viola's exemplary status in my analysis of the technical expansion of subjectivity. Viola brings technology into the very heart of self-affection, showing how it brokers an expansion in the latter's scope and thus laying bare the embodied materiality of subjectivation.

To grasp the radicality of this expansion, we can contextualize it in relation to the recent work of philosopher Bernard Stiegler, whose effort to account for the correlation of being and technics foregrounds the homology

of consciousness and cinema that, he claims, informs subjectivity in the era of real time media. Stiegler proposes as the hinge of his philosophy of technology an interpretation of Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness whose aim is to foreground,[11] against Husserl's own hesitations, the radical consequence of his analysis—namely, the intrinsically technical basis of time-consciousness.[12] If time-consciousness can be shown to rely on a mediation by a technically constituted object—what Husserl calls the temporal object—then the very content of the self on Husserl's account, the consciousness of the self flowing in time, would itself be dependent on technical mediation. While Stiegler's demonstration of this argument will, on the one hand, serve as a model for unpacking the implications of Viola's own technical contamination of self-affection, it will also, on the other hand, confront its limitation in Viola's work because, as we shall see, its fidelity to Husserl's philosophy renders it fundamentally unable to grasp the embodied basis that links together self-affection and technical mediation.

   Stiegler begins his intervention by ratifying Husserl's decision to channel his analysis of the temporality of consciousness through the temporal object. (A temporal object is defined as an object that is not simply in time but is constituted through time and whose properly objective flux coincides with the flux of consciousness when it is experienced by a consciousness. Husserl's preferred example is the melody.) According to Stiegler, the recourse to the temporal object is necessary if we are to grasp the temporal basis of consciousness. Given the status of consciousness as a structure of flux, we cannot conduct an analysis of the phenomenological conditions under which this flux is constituted at the level of consciousness but must account for it through an analysis of an object that is itself temporal. More simply, our effort to grasp the flux of our own consciousness encounters a structural deferral or *différance* because what is to be grasped (the flux itself) would always be already gone by at the moment of grasping. Shifting focus from the flux itself to the temporal object allows Husserl to stabilize the

11. To date, Stiegler's corpus comprises three books and a handful of articles, as well as an important interview with Derrida. See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus,* trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, Calif., 1999), *La Technique et le temps,* 3 vols. (Paris, 1994–2001), "The Discrete Image," in Jacques Derrida and Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews,* trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge, 2002), and "The Time of Cinema: On the 'New World' and 'Cultural Exception,'" trans. Beardsworth, *Tekhnema* 4 (1998): 62–113; hereafter abbreviated "T." Stiegler has also written an important article on Derrida, "Derrida and Technology: Fidelity at the Limits of Deconstruction and the Prosthesis of Faith," trans. Beardsworth, in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader,* ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 238–70.
12. This reading is developed most explicitly in *La Technique et le temps,* vol. 2, chap. 4, and is usefully summarized in "T," pp. 68–76.

time of consciousness in a way that avoids or, perhaps better, that sutures this temporal divide.

Focusing on the technical conditions of the contemporary temporal object allows Stiegler, in turn, to complicate Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness by introducing technicity—what he calls tertiary memory (a gloss on Husserl's image-consciousness)—[13] into the heart of primary retention.[14] Tertiary memory, meaning the storage of the past in forms that allow it to be revivified or assumed by consciousness in the present, can be understood as a fusion of Husserl's conception of image-consciousness with Derrida's concept of tradition from the *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry* (and thus, by implication at least, with Heidegger's concept of *Geworfenheit*).[15] As a result of this fusion, the deconstruction of Husserl begun by Derrida in his early works is advanced a step further. By bringing Derrida's concept of tradition to bear on his deconstruction of primary and secondary retention in *Speech and Phenomena*,[16] Stiegler shows how this latter is itself dependent on the former, understood as a third form of retention, tertiary memory (or retention). It is only because a subject has the capacity to assume a collective past that has not been lived by it that it can assume and re-present its own past (secondary retention or remembrance) and that it experiences the present now as a thickness comprised

13. Husserl gives as examples of an object of image-consciousness a bust or a painting where the artist in effect archives his or her experience in the form of a memory trace. While this trace can be experienced later by another consciousness, it could not be said that it is experienced by this consciousness because it has been neither perceived nor lived by this consciousness. It is an image of the past and of the memory of another consciousness, but it cannot be the image of a memory that is part of the lived past of the consciousness viewing it at a later date. For this reason, Husserl excludes image-consciousness from any role in time-consciousness. Stiegler's strategy is to reverse this exclusion by showing how tertiary memory—memory that has *not been lived by consciousness*—is in fact the very condition of time-consciousness.

14. This move involves two specific critical corrections of Husserl's analysis, which are themselves conjugated together in Stiegler's analysis of contemporary media technology. (Here Stiegler follows and, as we shall see, extends in a crucial manner Derrida's analysis in *Speech and Phenomena.*) On the one hand, Stiegler contests the fundamental opposition of perception and imagination on which Husserl's important differentiation of primary retention from secondary memory (or recollection) is rooted. On the other hand, Stiegler contests Husserl's blanket exclusion of image-consciousness (tertiary memory) from time-consciousness. (Here, Stiegler follows Derrida's analysis in *Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction,* which to an extent—but only to an extent—converges with the evolution of Husserl's own thinking.) In both cases, Stiegler's criticisms involve a questioning of the primacy accorded the category of the lived *(vécu)* in Husserl's analysis. Moreover, the two corrections are, not surprisingly, themselves intrinsically correlated because it is precisely in virtue of the absolute distinction between perception and imagination that Husserl is able to exclude image-consciousness from the phenomenon of time-consciousness.

15. See Stiegler, "Derrida and Technology."

16. Derrida's deconstruction focused on undermining the opposition between perception and imagination that Husserl attributed to the difference between primary retention and secondary retention.

of protentions and retentions. In the context of Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness, the philosophical payoff of Stiegler's analysis is thus to level any absolute distinctions among primary retention, secondary memory, and tertiary memory and in fact to invert the hierarchy proposed by Husserl such that it is tertiary memory that introduces secondary memory into primary retention. Insofar as it necessarily finds itself in the midst of a horizon—a world already constituted and comprising both what it had experienced in the past *and* what of the past it never experienced (that is, what was experienced by others and given to it through technical memory supports)—primary retention is not only thoroughly contaminated with the other forms of memory but is in fact conditioned by them.[17]

   That this situation is the rigorous and radical consequence of Husserl's own recourse to the temporal object can be discerned (and discerned solely) through an analysis sensitive to the technical specificity of the temporal object. Not entirely unlike Friedrich Kittler, who has famously foregrounded the triad gramophone, film, and typewriter, Stiegler insists that the advent of technical recording marks a fundamental break in the history of the correlation of technology and time.[18] Yet in almost total opposition to Kittler's technical determinism,[19] Stiegler's interest concerns what we might call the structural coupling between media technology and consciousness.[20] Recording, precisely by giving the possibility to perceive (hear or see) more than once an exactly identical temporal object, brings home the inversion to which he submits Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness. To the extent that two perceptions (auditions or visions) of the same temporal object are themselves not identical, their difference must be explained by the infiltration of the latter by the former. Thus, in the scenario of perceiving the same temporal object twice, we confront the necessity of recognizing some form of selection *within* retention and, thus, some constitutive contamination of retention by secondary memory. How else, indeed, could we explain the way in which the first audition (or vision) modifies the second audition (or vision) if not by saying that the modifi-

   17. Here, Stiegler is reading Husserl through Heidegger's notion of historicity and thrownness and, even more immediately, through Derrida's own reading of the function of tradition in Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry*.
   18. See Friedrich Kittler, introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif., 1999), pp. 1–19.
   19. For a criticism of Kittler's technical determinism, see Hansen, "Cinema beyond Cybernetics, or How to Frame the Digital Image," *Configurations* 10 (Winter 2002): 51–90.
   20. I borrow the term "structural coupling" from autopoietic theory, where it designates the correlation of a closed autopoietic system (the living) with an environment or with other systems. Such correlation is the vehicle for the evolution of the system. See Humberto Maturana and Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston, 1987) and *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht, 1980).

cation of the second audition is rooted in the secondary memory of the first, that is, the recollection of it as past? Moreover, insofar as it comprises the very condition of possibility for this contamination, recording also marks the moment at which tertiary memory becomes the operator of this contamination and thus the condition of possibility for both secondary memory and primary retention themselves:[21] "Image consciousness . . . is that in which the primary and the secondary are both rooted, owing to the technical possibility of repetition of the temporal object. . . . Recording is the phonographic revelation of the structure of all temporal objects" ("T," p. 76).

For Stiegler, this dependence of consciousness (primary retention) on tertiary memory (and technology) is best exemplified by cinema. This is so in the first place because the singularity of cinematic recording technology brings together two coincidences: on the one hand, the "photo-phonographic coincidence of past and reality" and, on the other, the coincidence "between the film flux and the flux of the consciousness of the film's spectator that it triggers" ("T," p. 66). But it is all the more so because cinema is the technological art of selection par excellence. In cinema more than any other recording technology, the selection criteria through which consciousness passes prior retentions on by reduction can be seen to be more than simply the work of secondary memory of lived retentions and, indeed, to be directly the work of tertiary memory. By suturing the flux of consciousness to the flux of a temporal object that is, for most spectators and in most instances, almost entirely composed of tertiary memories (memories of experiences *not* lived by them), cinema exerts an objective stranglehold over time-consciousness. This, for Stiegler, is precisely what accounts for cinema's power to impose the American way of life, and it is also what rules over the contemporary televisual regime of real time, where tertiary memories invade retention in the space of the instant. Indeed, on the basis of its exemplarity in this respect, Stiegler will go on to assert cinema's identity with life: cinematic techniques of editing, revision of daily rushes, acceleration and deceleration, special effects, and so on are, he asserts, the very techniques of time-consciousness itself. Essentially a "center of post-production . . . in

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21. At the limit, this means that *différance* is itself conditioned by, or better, coemergent with technology and that different technical conditions for recording will yield different epochs of *différance*. This is the basis of Stiegler's transformative appropriation of Derrida's work, and it shares some important aspects with the appropriation of French poststructuralism by today's German media theorists, most notably Bernard Siegert and, of course, Kittler. Not incidentally, it is one that is criticized by Derrida himself in, for example, his televised debate with Stiegler; see Derrida and Stiegler, "Echographies of Television," *Echographies of Television.* Further consideration of this interesting and significant debate is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper.

charge of editing, staging and realizing the flux of primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions," consciousness simply is "cinematographic" ("T," p. 84).

Double Intentionality

Devotees of Husserl's philosophical project would no doubt pause at this point to ask just what has been left out of this picture. Where, for example, has the emphasis on the thickness of the now gone? And what has become of the effort to theorize an absolute foundation, a continuity of time stretching from the now backwards and binding together all the previous nows? That something fundamental is, in fact, missing from Stiegler's account becomes apparent in our context when we ask what happens in the moment when cinema takes over the function of selecting what will be re-presented in the now of the new perception. Contra Stiegler, this technical supplementation of time-consciousness does not replace or obviate the synthetic activity of present perception but simply renders its foundation more complex. Because the material available for consciousness to intend has been preselected, part of the job of consciousness has been taken over by technology, that is, by tertiary memory; but this fact has absolutely no bearing on the necessity that the material intended be intended in an act of present perception (even if one that is always differed and deferred). Put another way, Stiegler's hypostatization of the temporal object makes the error of forgetting the doubling of intentionality that is central to Husserl's conception of time-consciousness. "Every experience," Husserl explains, "is 'consciousness' *[Bewusstsein]* and consciousness is always consciousness-of," but every experience is also "itself experienced *[selbst erlebt]* and to that extent also intended *[bewusst]. This* being intended *[Bewusst-sein]* is consciousness of the experience *[Erlebnis]*."[22] Retention, in other words, designates the retaining of the temporal object (for example, musical tone) *as well as* the just-passed perception of that object: the actual phase of the flow thus includes, in addition to the retention of the just-past object-event, the just elapsed phase of the flow itself. Transposed to Stiegler's analysis of the temporal object, this structure introduces a doubling between, on the one hand, the entire complex encompassing primary retention, secondary memory, and tertiary memory that forms the temporal object through whose mediation the flux is perceived and, on the other hand, this perception itself. There is (corresponding to the first case) a consciousness of the

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22. Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Inner Time Consciousness;* quoted in Varela, "The Specious Present: A Neurophenomenology of Time Consciousness," in *Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science,* ed. Jean Petitot et al. (Stanford, Calif., 1999), p. 289.

content of the flux and (corresponding to the second) a consciousness of the flux itself.

To grasp Stiegler's departure from Husserl, let us focus on four weaknesses of his analysis:

First, Stiegler generalizes on the basis of a specific situation. By taking the repeated perception of a recorded, hence identical, temporal object as his example of the technical infiltration of perception and by claiming that this is the default perceptual situation today, Stiegler transforms what, for Husserl, was a theoretically useful, but by no means typical, situation into a universal model of perception. This overstates the role of the example by collapsing two separate acts that remain distinct, even if indiscernible, in Husserl: the consciousness of the temporal object and the consciousness of the flux itself.

Second, by shifting the paradigm for the temporal object from the melody to the cinema, Stiegler in effect disembodies Husserl's example in two ways: on the one hand, he trades in a richly and multiply embodied perceptual experience (the acoustic) for the most abstract and hence most noble sense (the visual);[23] and, on the other hand, he obscures the fundamental divide separating two vastly different forms of selection, the preselection that the cinematic temporal object has always already operated on retention prior to the moment of perception and the selection that actually occurs in the rehearing of a recorded musical memory (or, for that matter, the reviewing of a film) where it is the entirety of bodily response that drives the selection. Aside from its other problems, this shift has the disadvantage of compounding the tendency toward disembodiment that plagues Husserl's philosophy of time-consciousness.

Third, Stiegler's valorization of cinema actually distorts the function of selection by ascribing the contamination of primary retention to the *remembrance* of tertiary memory rather than to the residual impact its own embodied history exerts on the present. In this way, Stiegler's account of the technical contamination of retention fails to situate it within the retentional chain that connects the present now, thick with its retentions and protentions, to the entirety of the past of the living being whose present it is; accordingly, contamination remains, in a certain sense, external to primary retention. More important still, by ennobling remembrance (secondary retention) as the vehicle for the contamination of primary retention—the

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23. On the nobility of vision and its rootedness in the embodied sensory modalities of touch and hearing, see the wonderful essay by Hans Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses," *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 135–56.

effect of a prior audition or viewing of a recorded technical object on a subsequent one—Stiegler mistakes what is at issue here. Rather than bearing on present consciousness through what we might call image memory (the recollection of a past object now become an image), the prior audition or viewing of a recording bears on the present in a far more embodied way, as part of that living being's still living past or habit memory.[24] To return to Husserl's example, when we hear a recorded melody a second (or third or *nth*) time, our hearing is not impacted by our conscious recollection of the first experience in its entirety or as a preselected unit, but rather by our largely unconscious, deeply embodied, and singular response to particular aspects of it.

Finally, Steigler's analysis has almost nothing to say about protention, the future-directed correlate of retention that, as we shall soon see, comprises the central force of the technical expansion of the present at issue in Viola's aesthetic.

All of these weaknesses can be traced more or less directly to the inadequacy of Stiegler's model of media technology—cinema—to encompass what is at stake in the contemporary technoscape. Unlike the audiovisual and televisual technologies that constitute the support for tertiary memory, today's digital technologies and machinic systems function largely beneath the threshold of image memory.[25] Accordingly, rather than forming archival and delivery systems for an ever-expanded system of tertiary memory, today's technologies facilitate the global transmission of data at the microphysical scale without any necessary regard for human perceptual ratios.[26] In this context, what we might call the "ethical imperative of time" dictates that we find a way to reassert the "phenomenological difference . . . between [retention and memory as] two modifications of nonperception," the very difference that finds itself threatened in Stiegler's model of a real time system

24. I owe this particular understanding of the distinction between image memory and habit memory to Raymond Ruyer, "There Is No Subconscious: Embryogenesis and Memory," trans. R. Scott Walker, *Diogenes* 142 (Summer 1998): 24–46. I discuss Ruyer's distinction, and his work more generally, in *New Philosophy for New Media,* chap. 2 and esp. chap. 5.

25. For an excellent account of contemporary media technology, see John Johnston, "Machinic Vision," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Autumn 1999): 27–48. See also Kittler, "Computer Graphics: A Semi-Technical Introduction," trans. Sara Ogger, *The Grey Room,* no. 2 (Winter 2001): 30–45; Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); and Paul Virilio, *The Vision-Machine,* trans. Julie Rose (Bloomington, Ind., 1994). David Wills advances a forceful critique of Stiegler's valorization of cinema as a valorization of the cinematic convention of realism; see David Wills, "Technœlogy or the Discourse of Speed," in *Prosthetics: Carnal, Assembly, Extant,* ed. Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra (forthcoming).

26. See Kittler, introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter;* see also Kittler, "There Is No Software" and "Protected Mode," *Literature, Media, Information Systems,* ed. Johnston (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 147–55.

of cinematic perception.[27] For it is only by affirming the synthetic interval comprising presence (or, for Derrida, retention) that we can maintain the specificity of human experience as life. We must, in a word, allow the now of perception to become contaminated with affection; we must identify the now with that threshold within which perception of the flux of an object affects itself and thus generates a supplementary perception, a perception of the flux itself, time-consciousness.

Body

To follow this imperative means emphasizing yet another variant aspect of the technical supplementation of time-consciousness, one that invests in technology's potential enlargement of the living now itself and not just its expanded mediation of tradition.[28] Indeed, as we shall see, if technology does expand our access to our own historical past, it does so precisely on the basis of such an enlargement. What makes it possible for tertiary memory to invade primary retention in the first place is the prior technical supplementation of the latter, that is, the extension of the thickness of the now by the very technologies that inform and produce tertiary memory. On precisely this point, the understanding of temporality proposed by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception* shows itself to be far more auspicious for today's convergence of consciousness and technology than either Derrida's or Stiegler's. Fundamentally, this is because Merleau-Ponty seeks to preserve the coherence and importance of Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness and, specifically, his concept of the thickness of the present by embedding it in the context of a phenomenology of the living body.

27. Derrida, "Speech and Phenomena," *"Speech and Phenomena" and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs,* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill., 1973), p. 65. Here it is important that Derrida does not, as Stiegler does, simply conflate retention and secondary memory. His point is rather that both involve the modification of nonperception—and thus that there is no such thing as a perceptual instant or moment of full presence—but that they do so in different ways. Combined with Stiegler's insistence on the technical specificity of *différance* and his correlation of it with the real time mediation of our contemporary global televisual system, this distinction calls on us to identify the now with the interval specific to human synthesis and thus (in contradistinction to Stiegler's own conclusions) to distinguish retention from tertiary memory. For the Derrida-Stiegler debate, see Derrida and Stiegler, "Echographies of Television." For a helpful and insightful critical commentary on this debate as a missed encounter, see Beardsworth, "Towards a Critical Culture of the Image," review of *Echographies de la télévision* by Derrida and Stiegler, *Tekhnema* 4 (Spring 1998), http://tekhnema.free.fr/4beardsworth.html

28. This, obviously, is a living now that differs from Husserl's precisely because it incorporates the technical at its very core. In this sense, today's technologies prove the validity of Derrida's deconstruction of the voice and the living present, but in a way that strips it of its bite. Indeed, as Stiegler's project maintains (following André Leroi-Gourhan), human life has always coevolved with technology, even if this only becomes strikingly apparent today; see Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*.

From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, Husserl was essentially correct to insist that there must be "a [primordial] consciousness having behind it no consciousness to be conscious of it," but was severely impoverished in his means to account for such a consciousness (quoted in *PP*, p. 422). For Merleau-Ponty, such a primordial consciousness is simply presence itself as the privileged dimension of a living (human) being:

> Time exists for me because I have a present. . . . The present (in the wide sense, along with its horizons of primary past and future), nevertheless enjoys a privilege because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide. . . . Th[e] ultimate consciousness [of Husserl's analysis] is . . . the consciousness of the present. [*PP*, p. 424]

In this role, presence explains the intimate correlation—the transductive relation—[29] between time and the subject;[30] and it also foregrounds the role of life as the basis for the temporal continuity operated by presence.[31]

Most important for our current concerns, however, this priority placed on presence understood as the existential modality of life informs Merleau-Ponty's defense of Husserl's distinction between retention and recollection, that is to say, the very distinction that informs the ethical imperative introduced above. For Merleau-Ponty, retention designates a mode in which the past remains with the living present (the subject as the upsurge of time): "I still have the immediate past in hand. . . . I do not posit the past, or construct

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29. Following Simondon, we can understand a transductive relation as one in which neither term exists independently of the relation; see Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," in *Incorporations,* ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York, 1993), pp. 296–319; see also Simondon, *L'Individuation psychique et collective* (Paris, 1989).

30. "To analyse time is not to follow out the consequences of a pre-established conception of subjectivity, it is to gain access, through time, to its concrete structure" (*PP*, p. 410).

31. "Subjectivity is not in time because it takes up or lives through time, and merges with the cohesion of a life" (*PP*, p. 422). "Time's 'synthesis' is a transitional synthesis, the action of a life which unfolds, and there is no way of bringing it about other than by living that life, there is no seat of time; time bears itself on and launches itself afresh" (*PP*, p. 423). In this respect, the links between subjectivity, time, and life anticipate Merleau-Ponty's later understanding of life as the introduction of negativity into being in the *La Nature* lectures. Time represents the fundamental existential modality of life insofar as this latter remains constitutively incomplete. "Past and future exist only too unmistakably in the world, they exist in the present, and what being itself lacks in order to be of the temporal order, is the not-being of elsewhere, formerly and tomorrow" (*PP*, p. 412). "The past, therefore, *is* not past, nor the future future. It exists only when a subjectivity is there to disrupt the plenitude of being in itself, to adumbrate a perspective, and introduce non-being into it" (*PP*, p. 421). The only difference between this analysis and that of *La Nature* is the displacement of the term *subjectivity* in favor of life and the flesh. See Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature,* trans. Robert Vallier, ed. Dominique Séglard (Evanston, Ill., 2003). I discuss Merleau-Ponty's conception of life in these lectures in Hansen, "The Embryology of the (In)Visible," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty,* ed. Taylor Carman and Hansen (Cambridge, 2004), chap. 9. See also Renaud Barbaras, "A Phenomenology of Life," in ibid.

it from an *Abschattung* really distinct from it and by means of an express act; but . . . I reach it in its recent, yet already elapsed, thisness" (*PP*, p. 417). Moreover, because of the continuity of the past that inheres in living presence and within which the "presence of the whole past" is reasserted, this thickness of the present expands to include the entirety of the past in a retentional chain that differs essentially from the recollective act of "re-presentification." This is what Husserl calls operative intentionality *(fungierende Intentionalität),* and, in the embodiment it undergoes in Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, it gains something that it lacks on Husserl's (as well as Derrida's and Stiegler's) account: namely, a support within the simultaneously time-constituting and time-constituted living body. Accordingly, the modality of recollection is itself grounded in embodied retention:

> There are certainly identifying syntheses, but only in the express memory and voluntary recollection of the remote past, that is, in those modes derived from consciousness of the past. . . . The objective landmarks in relation to which I assign a place to my recollection in the mediatory identification, and the intellectual synthesis generally, have themselves a temporal significance *only because gradually, step by step, the synthesis of apprehension links me to my whole actual past.* [*PP*, p. 418; emphasis added][32]

There are, in effect, two ways in which the present connects to the past: recollection that re-presents a moment of the past and retention, via which the entirety of the lived past continues to inhere in the living present.

This distinction between recollection and retention accounts for the doubling of intentionality, introduced above, according to which the perception of the temporal object-event yields a separate but indiscernible perception of the temporal flux itself. From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, that is, the perception of a previously perceived, recorded (hence identical) tem-

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32. This embodiment of retention is also the basis for Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Heidegger's conception of historical time for inconsistency. Because of its anchoring in a resolute decision that gives it "its future in advance and rescues [it] once and for all from disintegration," Heidegger's historical time is impossible in terms of his own thought: "For, if time is an *ek-stase,* if present and past are two results of this *ek-stase,* how could we ever cease to see time from the point of view of the present, and how could we finally escape from the inauthentic? It is always in the present that we are centered, and our decisions start from there" (*PP*, p. 427). Earlier, answering the question why the temporal *ek-stase* is not an "absolute disintegration in which the individuality of the moments disappears," Merleau-Ponty says: "It is because the disintegration undoes what the passage from future to present had achieved . . . ; as [the present moment] was being built up, it made its approach known by progressively fewer *Abschattungen,* for it was approaching *bodily*" (*PP*, p. 420). This criticism is not without bearing on Stiegler's (and Derrida's) notion of tradition and the thematic of retentional finitude.

poral object generates two distinct experiences: the perception of a present act of representation and the present representation of a past experience. Only the former is, properly speaking, perceived, which means that it and it alone can enter into the retentional chain of living presence; the latter, by contrast, can enter into this chain only insofar as it impacts the present perception: "My act of representation, unlike the experiences represented, is actually present to me; the former is perceived, the latter are merely represented. Either a former or a potential experience, in order that they may appear to me, need to be borne into being by a primary consciousness, which in this case is my inner perception of recollection or imagination" (*PP*, p. 424). Underneath the recollective act through which tertiary memories are re-presented in the living presence of a being who never lived them is a present perception of this recollective act that itself exceeds the grasp of recollection. In marked contrast to Stiegler's cinematic model of consciousness, this understanding allows tertiary memories to enter retention only through the same severely constrained, indirect path that actually lived memories must take: namely, by tinging or flavoring the embodied perceptual present. On this understanding, tertiary memories are not different in kind from secondary ones; in both cases, what accounts for their efficacy is their ability to contaminate retentional traces that belong to living presence.[33]

Merleau-Ponty's defense of the difference between retention and recollection on the basis of the priority of living presence has further implications for our conceptualization of the technical contamination of time-consciousness. First, it allows us to rethink the function of the temporal object in a fundamental manner. Eschewing the identification of time-consciousness and the temporal object that is so central for Stiegler's cinematic paradigm, Merleau-Ponty insists that the temporal object comprises one pole of a larger ecological relationship. In the normal experience of temporal flux (as contrasted with the theoretically illustrative example of perceiving a temporal object like a melody or a cinematic sequence), perception takes place within a vastly larger context than that afforded by an isolated subject-object relationship:

33. Considering the example of a table that bears traces of my past life, Merleau-Ponty draws the following conclusion: "These traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and, in so far as I find in them signs of some 'previous' event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, *because I carry this particular significance within myself*" (*PP*, p. 413; emphasis added). Something similar can be said for the example of a movie and, importantly, *independently of whether I have seen it before or not*. The traces of the past it contains are present and I take them as signs of a previous event, one lived by me or not lived by me, through the embodied meaning it triggers in me.

> I do not so much perceive objects as reckon with an environment; I seek
> support in my tools, and am at my task rather than confronting it. Hus-
> serl uses the terms protentions and retentions for the intentionalities
> which anchor me to an environment. They do not run from a central *I,*
> but from my perceptual field itself, so to speak, which draws along in its
> wake its own horizon of retentions, and bites into the future with its
> protentions. [*PP*, p. 416]

Only within such an expanded ecology can the problem of "how to make
time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident" be resolved,
time being itself what underlies "the *notion* of time . . . not [as] an object
of our knowledge, but [as] a dimension of our being" (*PP*, p. 415). With his
call for an ecological conception of time, Merleau-Ponty thus advances a
systemic correlation that serves to open the fundamental correlation—of
subject and world—that comprises being itself. Time differs fundamentally
from any object in the world "because it discloses subject and object as two
abstract 'moments' of a unique structure which is *presence.* It is through
time that being is conceived, because it is through the relations of time-
subject and time-object that we are able to understand those obtaining be-
tween subject and world" (*PP*, pp. 430–31). For Stiegler's neo-Husserlian
correlation of time-consciousness and temporal object, Merleau-Ponty
substitutes a more complex correlation between this very correlation and
the ecological correlation of living being (subject) and environment (world)
for which it stands in as surrogate. In this more complex correlation pro-
posed by Merleau-Ponty, what is at stake is not an identification so much
as a division that clarifies how time and being converge in the primordial
activity of living presence.

Second, Merleau-Ponty's defense of the difference between retention and
recollection yields a variant conception of our relation to the tradition and
hence to tertiary memory. For him, the opening to a past that has not been
lived by me is itself made possible by my capacity to open onto my own
lived past:

> As my living present opens upon a past which I nevertheless am no
> longer living through, and on a future which I do not yet live, and per-
> haps never shall, it can also open on to temporalities outside my living
> experience and acquire a social horizon, with the result that my world is
> expanded to the dimensions of that collective history which my private
> existence takes up and carries forward. The solution of all problems of
> transcendence is to be sought in the thickness of the pre-objective pres-
> ent, in which we find our bodily being, our social being, and the pre-

existence of the world, that is, the starting point of "explanations," in so
far as they are legitimate—and at the same time the basis of our free-
dom. [*PP*, p. 433]

In both cases, what makes the opening to the past possible is the retentional
(and protentional) continuity that inheres in living presence. This is what
I meant above when, inverting Stiegler's hierarchy, I suggested that presence
forms the condition of possibility for our access to tradition and tertiary
memory.

Finally, Merleau-Ponty's defense of Husserl's fundamental distinction
introduces an important shift in emphasis, from retention to protention,
that contrasts markedly with Stiegler's (and Derrida's) investment in reten-
tional finitude and the politics of memory. This shift is signaled from the
beginning of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of temporality at the moment when
he proposes a striking inversion of the Heraclitean metaphor:

> Time presupposes a view of time. It is, therefore, not like a river, not a
> flowing substance. . . . No sooner have I introduced an observer . . . than
> temporal relationships are reversed. . . . The volume of water already
> carried by is not moving towards the future, but sinking into the past;
> what is to come is on the side of the source, for time does not come
> from the past. It is not the past that pushes the present, nor the present
> that pushes the future, into being; the future is not prepared behind the
> observer, *it is a brooding presence moving to meet him.* [*PP*, p. 411; em-
> phasis added]

When he subsequently comes to account for the givenness of the future,
Merleau-Ponty parts company with Husserl. Whereas the latter modelled
protention on retention, constructing it as a kind of inverse of the model
of the present becoming past, the former insists on the fundamental dif-
ference between them. If, Merleau-Ponty hypothetically proposes, I were to
construct the future as a retrospective projection (by stealing the passage of
the present, "treat[ing] my immediate past as a remote one, and my actual
present as past," then seeing a vacuum ahead and identifying it as the fu-
ture), this would not open the future for me. For, he concludes, "even if
. . . we form an idea of the future with the help of what we have seen, the
fact remains that, in order to pro-ject it ahead of us, we need in the first
place a sense of the future" (*PP*, p. 414). As a dimension of being (or living
presence), this sense of the future, protention, is irreducibly and funda-
mentally distinct from retention. Within the Western philosophical tradi-

tion (with the possible exception of Heidegger),[34] this asymmetry between protention and retention (when it has even been acknowledged) has always been to the benefit of the latter; significantly, but hardly surprisingly, it lies at the very heart of Stiegler's valorization of the cinematic paradigm according to which the only way to become a subject, to accede to consciousness, is to adopt the past, that is, to let one's present be contaminated by recorded, reproducible memories.[35]

If Stiegler's ratification of the philosophical priority accorded retention reflects the very contentlessness or abstractness of the future, the anticipation of which can only come, for him, via a politics of memory (essentially, a projection from the past to the future), it can be directly linked to his inability to envision any alternative for modelling how the future opens for living presence. Precisely such a model lies at the core of the late neuroscientist Francisco Varela's conception of the correlation of time-consciousness and affectivity. For Varela, the neuroscientific paradigm of cognition arising out of affectivity or, more precisely, out of the chaotic dynamics of neural emergence, reaffirms the assymmetry between protention and retention in a way that lends a marked privilege to the former. For Varela, affectivity is the phenomenological correlate of the neural dynamics from which the present emerges and is therefore inseparable from the protentional dimension of time consciousness. This means that protention must be understood as generically asymmetrical to retention; unlike retention, protention intends the new prior to any impression or perceptual present, and, for this reason, "is always suffused with affect and an emotional tone that accompanies the flow. . . . Protention is not a kind of expectation

34. But for Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Heidegger—that his privileging of the future, insofar as it relies on a decision, must, in contradistinction to his thinking, be rooted in the living present— see n. 38. With this argument, Merleau-Ponty denies the transcendence operated by historical time in *Being and Time* and makes good on his own claim that the "solution of all problems of transcendence" can be found in "the thickness of the pre-objective present" (*PP*, p. 433).

35. In this respect, it is striking that Stiegler barely mentions Husserlian protention, which does form a counterpart to retention in Derrida's analysis in "Speech and Phenomena." When he does mention it, moreover, he reduces it to retention (see for example, his consideration of the role of "sequential expectations" in the spectatorial synthesis: "We know now that these expectations (that Husserl names protentions) are produced by the play of primary, secondary and tertiary retentions that takes place between the flux of spectatorial consciousness, that is synthesis, on the one hand, and the flux of images of the temporal object on the other" ["T," p. 102]). This remains true for his fuller analysis in *Le Technique et le temps,* vol. 3, where he does broach protention, but in a way that derives it from or renders it symmetrical to retention, thus perpetuating its philosophical subordination. See, for example, the analysis of the protentional structure of Hitchcock's *Four O'Clock* in Stiegler, *Le Technique et le temps,* 3:55–58. The problem with Stiegler's analysis again seems to be an artifact of his examples and his overriding desire to identify time-consciousness and the temporal object; what an adequate analysis of futurity, and of protention, requires is an openness to the future that is belied by the scenario of projecting based on retrospection, that is, on one's prior experience of a temporal object.

that we can understand as 'predictable,' but an openness that is capable of self-movement, indeterminate but about to manifest. In this quality it provides the natural link into affection or, more aptly, with some form of self-affectedness."[36] In order to intend the new prior to the constitution of an impression, consciousness must, as it were, draw on itself, and, because the content of time-consciousness cannot (in the case of protention) be given by an impression, affect must lie at the very origin of time itself.

Upon initial glance we might take this to mean that affectivity is to protention as tertiary memory is to retention, that affectivity somehow fills in when there is no memorial content available to ground consciousness. However, given the conclusion of our above analysis, things cannot be so simple. For, by validating Merleau-Ponty's insight into the privilege of the future (protention), Varela's argument concretizes what goes on in the thickness of the preobjective living present and exposes the deeper significance of Merleau-Ponty's claim for its priority: it is nothing less than the ground of the passage of time and of perception and, thus, is constitutively in excess of perception itself. If the priority of protention renders perception derivative, as Varela claims it does, the reason is more profound than he realizes. Far from being (merely) impressional, that is, the result of a unidirectional relation from object to consciousness, perception is relational because it occurs through a recursive correlation of the living present with the intentionalities (protentions and retentions) that "anchor [it] to an environment" (*PP*, p. 416),[37] that locate it in a field that does not converge on a central I. This is why perception—and all its coessential modifications, including protention-retention but also retention-recollection and protention-projection—must ultimately be rooted in the more basic operation of living presence (or simply life). Such a position is succinctly expressed by Gilbert Simondon, Merleau-Ponty's student, when he claims affectivity as a mode of bodily experience that mediates between the individual and the preindividual, between the constituted body and its constituting virtual or ecstatic milieu. According to Simondon, whereas perception appeals to structures already constituted in the interior of the individuated being, "affectivity indicates and comprises this relation between the individualized being and preindividual reality: it is thus to a certain extent heterogeneous in relation to individualized reality, and appears to bring it something from the exterior, indicating to the individualized

36. Varela, "The Specious Present," p. 296. I explore Varela's work on time-consciousness in much greater detail in Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media,* chap. 7.

37. Note that though it shares a similar premise with Derrida's deconstruction of the perception (impression)-imagination divide, this argument against the impressional account of perception does so for very different reasons and to very different effect.

being that it is not a complete and closed set *[ensemble]* of reality."[38] Brought to bear on our concern in this essay, this analysis means that we cannot hope to account for the technical contamination of subjectivity if we limit it to a derived modality of the latter, to (say) the impact of tertiary memory on time-consciousness.[39]

The Now, Technically Expanded

Let us return now to the scenario with which this paper began: new media art deploying technology in order to expand self-affection. How does the capacity for new media art to broker a technical enlargement of the now bear out the conclusions of our above analysis? How does new media art accomplish the technical expansion of self-affection, if this latter is divorced from perception (or at least the impressional or inscriptional basis of perception)? And how does such an expansion, once accomplished, bear on the experience of subjectivity as an affection of the self by itself or, perhaps better, as an intensification of the self's own constitutive excess over itself?

It should come as no surprise that Viola will remain our point of focus in addressing this line of questioning. In his recent aesthetic experimentation with radical temporal acceleration and deceleration, Viola has deployed cinema and video technologies in order to enlarge the now in a manner that is precisely antithetical to cinema's role as the exemplary support for tertiary memory. Rather than opening the now to the past, to the nonlived experience materialized in technical objects, Viola's aesthetic experimentation with new media intensifies the now by literally overloading it with stimuli (units of information) that are properly imperceptible (that is, imperceptible to natural perception).[40] In his current *Passions* series, to which *Anima* belongs, Viola uses a technical capacity intrinsic to cinema—the capacity to shoot at high speed—extended and transformed by video, in order to contaminate the perceptual present with a nonlived that is not, as in both photography and cinema, the recurrence of a tertiary past (Roland Barthes's famous *ça a été*),[41] but rather the material infrastructure of

38. Simondon, *L'Individuation psychique et collective,* p. 108; translation mine.

39. It is precisely this reduction of subjectivity (and perception) to memory that I term *technesis.* See Hansen, *Embodying "Technesis": Technology beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2000), chap. 4, for a critique of this reduction in the work of Derrida. In my current work, however, I draw the terms of the reduction differently because I now understand subjectivity as affectivity to be distinct from both memory and perception.

40. Indeed, while Viola's interest in temporal flexibility afforded by audiovisual media dates from the mid-1980s if not earlier, it is the specific conjunction of cinema and video, which digitization made technically possible, that is crucial to the aesthetic experimentation with time at issue in his current work.

41. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1981), pp. 76–77.

the enlarged now itself or, in other words, the very affective texture of the neurodynamics that, in Varela's terminology, conditions the experience of living presence, the thickness of the preobjective present, of which Merleau-Ponty speaks.

Anticipated by Viola's 1995 *The Greeting* (a colorful, life-size projected image, modelled on Pontormo's *The Visitation,* of three women interacting in extreme slow motion), the *Passions* series proper began following Viola's residency at the Getty Research Center in 1998, where he participated in "The Representation of the Passions," a project devoted to exploring "how the extremes of emotion—in which the ability to reflect is actually lost"—can be visually depicted.[42] During his tenure at the Getty, Viola was commissioned to contribute a work to an exhibition at the National Gallery based on its collections. The result was the first project in the *Passions* series, *Quintet of the Astonished* (2000), based on the National Gallery's painting of *Christ Mocked* by Hieronymus Bosch. Writing in his notebook, Viola describes the project, prior to its realization:

> Quintet of the Astonished: odd but careful spatial grouping, horizontal aspect ratio, high-speed film, delicate lighting, wardrobe character types, Bosch's *Christ Mocked* in the National Gallery of London, the shifting surface of emotion and relation. Individuals run through a compressed range of conflicting emotions from laughing to crying, shot in high-speed film, displayed in high resolution, pristine, hyper-real. The emotions come and go so gradually, it is hard to tell where one begins and the other leaves off. Relations between the figures become fluid and shifting. [Quoted in "E," p. 33]

The artwork produced nearly two years later, following a preparatory period devoted to single-figure studies, is a rear-projected, large-scale piece, recorded on high-speed film, transferred to digital video, and projected at the normal video rate of 30 fps, depicting five life-size figures (four men and one woman) from the torso up as they slowly progress from neutral facial expressions through indeterminate transitional affects to primary emotions (sorrow, pain, anger, fear, rapture) (fig. 8). First appearing to the viewer as a still image not unlike a painting, the piece begins to take on life as the figures gradually start to move and the faces take on affective tonality. John Walsh's meticulous observation of the work conveys something of this complex transformative process:

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42. As posed by Salvatore Settis and Michael Roth of the Getty Institute, reported in John Walsh, "Emotions in Extreme Time: Bill Viola's *Passions* Project," in *Bill Viola: The Passions,* ed. Walsh (Los Angeles, 2003), p. 31; hereafter abbreviated "E."

FIGURE 8.   Bill Viola, *Quintet of the Astonished,* 2000 (color video rear projection on screen, 4′6″ x 8′). Digital video depicting affective shifts among a group of five figures; one minute of action captured with high-speed film yields sixteen minutes of playback. From *Bill Viola,* p. 266.

> The woman's crossed arms signal her sorrow from the beginning; after a few minutes, other hand and arm gestures begin to animate the scene. The ecstatic man in the center lifts his arm, and a hand is lifted to the woman's shoulder. The sorrowing man in front inclines his head, slumps, and crumples in anguish. Action peaks, then for several minutes it gradually subsides until only the rapturous man at center is moving, looking upward. ["E," pp. 36–37]

The figures appear to be self-contained as if living within internal affective worlds impervious to the outside as well as to their presence to each other; their gestures define self-reflexive spaces that encroach on one another purely incidentally.

Viola's intention here, as in the *Passions* project as a whole, is to capture the transitions between emotional states, what his inspiration, the Old Masters, "didn't paint, those steps in between" (quoted in "E," p. 36); using Merleau-Ponty's terminology, we might say that he attempts to place the punctual now—the still image of extreme emotionality—back into its field of intentionalities, thereby restoring the ecology that underlies affective experience. As he reports in an interview with Hans Belting, "I was most interested in opening up the spaces *between* the emotions. I wanted to focus on gradual transitions—the idea of emotional expression as a continual fluid motion. This meant that the transitions, the ambiguous time when you shift from being happy to sad, is just as important as the main emotion

itself."[43] Viola's interest in the transitions between emotions—his effort to differentiate them from the emotions proper to which they have traditionally been subordinated, if not entirely subsumed—resonates with a distinction drawn by psychoanalyst Daniel Stern between vitality affects and categorical affects: while the latter designates the emotions proper, the former designates normally imperceptible facial (and bodily) cues that signal the very fact of the body's aliveness.[44] Stern's work with affective attunement between mother and infant provides a helpful insight for understanding the resonances Viola's work establishes with the viewer. As we have already seen in the example of *Anima,* what we encounter in the *Passions* pieces is a supersaturated, temporally distended presentation of the rich, affective tonalities separating but connecting discrete emotional states. Lacking the vocabulary and experiential precedent to cope with this presentation, we are effectively in a position akin to the infant who must learn through the mechanism of (preverbal) bodily response. Yet in the case of Viola's work, we are exposed to affective nuances that are properly imperceptible to the human eye and that can only be presented through the mediation of technology and only assimilated through the modality of affectivity. Thus, whereas the infant learns to synchronize with another being through the medium of affect in a process that prepares him or her for social life to come, we learn just how much the modality of affectivity continues to work beneath perception in its normal function, as it were, and we also learn that our constitutive vitality or feeling of being alive, the substance of the living present, has its source in this normally imperceptible experiential modality. In Viola's work, the technical contamination of subjectivity simply *is* this learning process and the enhanced thickness of the present it brokers just *is* the openness to the source of our vitality. We use technology to extend our own subjectivities simply by attending to the subtle, supersaturated affective shifts on the faces of the represented figures and responding to them in the only way we can—via the richly nuanced resonances they trigger in our bodies.

We can, however, be even more precise about the supersaturation of the image and, specifically, about how it brokers a variant correlation of technical synthesis and subjective synthesis as contrasted with cinema. As with all the *Passions* pieces, Viola shot *Quintet of the Astonished* on high-speed

43. Bill Viola, "A Conversation," interview with Hans Belting, in *Bill Viola,* p. 200; hereafter abbreviated "C."

44. Stern developed his conception on the basis of infant-parent observation, but he does extend it, in a very interesting analysis, to art and specifically to photography; see Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York, 1985), chap. 4.

film (in this case, roughly sixteen times faster than normal speed, or 384 fps) that was subsequently digitally converted to video and projected at normal speed. Accordingly, the sixteen-minute video shows events that actually transpired in the space of about one minute. What is crucial about this technique, however, and what distinguishes it from any cinematic use of slow motion (including Gordon's) is that Viola exploits the recording potential of film to its fullest: *each second of film encompasses (roughly) 384 increments of motion, 384 discrete captures of information!* Playing this back at normal speed (at 24 fps, though now channeled through video's 30 fps) literally exposes the viewer to the imperceptible—to incredibly minute shifts in affective tonality well beyond what is observable by (non–technically supplemented) natural perception. When the viewer takes in this intensely supersaturated temporal object, which properly speaking cannot be a *perceptual* object at all, the guiding mechanism of cinematic temporality—the perceptual coincidence between the flux of the film and that of consciousness—gives way to a kind of affective contagion through which consciousness, by being put face-to-face with what it cannot properly perceive and yet what constitutes the very condition out of which the perceptible emerges, undergoes a profound self-affection. In this incredibly intense experience, we are made to live the very process through which our constitutive living present continually (re)emerges, from moment to moment—that is, the selection from a nonlived strictly contemporaneous with it (Varela's fast dynamics of neuroprocessing).

We might consequently wonder if, in fact, Viola's work does for protention what cinema (following Stiegler's analysis) does for retention, namely, effects its technical contamination by that which has traditionally been subordinated to it. Just as cinema exposes consciousness to a nonlived (tertiary memory) that becomes its condition of possibility, so too Viola's *Passions* videos expose living presence to a nonlived (the affective excess from out of which perception emerges) that appears to demarcate its condition of possibility. Yet beyond this general homology, the two begin to diverge starkly and in ways that recall the asymmetry between protention and retention explored above. Most basically, whereas Stiegler's tertiary memory comprises a nonlived *content* of consciousness, Viola's affective excess is a dimension of the living present that by definition cannot become a content of perception; it is a nonlived paradoxically *within* the living present. This difference becomes clear from the moment we consider Viola's account of the motivation behind the *Passions* series and *Quintet of the Astonished* in particular, namely, the paradoxical duplicity of emotions that are both the most fleeting of experiences and in some curious sense autonomous from

or outside of experience.[45] This duplicity was brought home to the artist in a project he undertook in 1987 involving the videotaping of a children's birthday party. Noting that of all beings, children wear their emotions right on the surface, Viola recounted being dumbstruck by his observation of joy literally growing and moving through the faces of his subjects. When, later in the process of creating what would become his 1987 piece, *Birthday Party,* Viola had the opportunity to observe his footage as still images, he found himself dumbfounded once again, this time by the fact that even in a still image that, after all, represents a cut with a duration of one-thirtieth of a second (in video) and which is therefore well below the neurophysiological threshold of the perceptual now (that is, consciousness),[46] there was not only an excess of emotion, but a certain temporal expansion of it beyond the confines of what was captured in the image. Struck by the peculiar autonomy of emotion from the temporal flux of perception, Viola was led to conclude that "emotions are outside of time," that they "exist somewhere outside of time."[47]

   If the affective texture underlying emotion designates the nonlived that Viola introjects into living presence, his work furnishes a vastly different model of technical contamination than Stiegler's. Not only is this nonlived of affectivity strictly contemporaneous with the protentional dimension of the living present (and indeed with its entire thickness, of which it is one valence), but more importantly, far from furnishing a nonlived *content* that exposes the selectional basis of retention (and thus of consciousness), it comprises a technical extension *of protention itself,* one that exposes the vastly different selectional process—one that is unconscious and involves an excess that, by definition, cannot be lived—through which living presence extends itself into the future. Bluntly put, while Stiegler thinks technicity is the exteriority of the nonlived past, Viola's work installs the technical supplement smack in the heart of the present itself as a mediator between perception and its source, affectivity. Interestingly, this means that Viola's model of technical contamination deploys technology as a mediator

   45. See Viola, lecture at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey, 6 May 2002, followed by a discussion with art historian and former Getty Museum director Walsh. I thank Bill Viola for permission to videotape his lecture and to use this material here.
   46. At least according to Varela, who puts this threshold at 0.3 seconds. See Varela, "The Specious Present."
   47. Viola, lecture. This insight into the excessive emotional plenitude is also the motivation behind Viola's systematic exploration of the representation of the passions in the Old Masters, an exploration that began during his year in residence at the Getty Center in 1998. More specifically, it helps to account for the concrete iconographic sources of *Quintet of the Astonished.*

of properly human modalities, though—it is important to stress—in a way that does not so much oppose technology to the human as take it to be a basic constituent of what we might call human technogenesis.[48] Whereas Stiegler's model introduces into perception technically recorded memories that are, in effect, exterior to consciousness, Viola uses the technology of high-speed film and video, within a digital environment, to bring affectivity, which is normally imperceptible, into the purview of perception.

In so doing, I would suggest, Viola manages to invert the intentionality of the temporal object; rather than opening viewers to the past, his work brings them face to face with the very texture of the now. Is this not precisely what I meant above when I suggested that the living present must be identified with the flux of affectivity itself rather than the flux of the temporal media object? By placing the technical inside the thickness of the present and effecting its operation from within the interval of the now, Viola's new media art brings technology to bear on the perceptual act by which the present is born anew, which is to say, on that pole of double intentionality that intends the temporal flux itself; and, in so doing, it exposes to our perceptual purview the very process through which the self affects itself, enlarging the now with a sense of its own constitutive basis. We can even say, I think, that Viola's work does all this precisely by dissolving the temporal object entirely, for what his work sets into correlation is not an object and a consciousness so much as two modalities of living presence itself *qua* the meeting of subject and world. If there is still an isomorphism of life and technology at work here, it is one that takes place at the level of what Viola calls time-form, and not at the level of memory content. Viola views the concept of time-form as specific to video: "The essence of the medium [of video] is time," Viola has claimed. "The 'time-form' of a work is intangible but real. It's a visceral thing . . . [that] has a unique shape for every situation, and it is unconsciously perceived by the viewer—felt more than seen. It is on the level of the time-form that a work usually fails or succeeds" ("C," p. 199). For Viola, importantly, it is through a commonality of time-form that affectivity and supersaturated video can be correlated: "The emotions . . . are the time-forms in our own personal lives. Their reality is change and transcience. . . . [And this same] time-form . . . operates in video on the

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48. On the coevolution of the human and technology, see André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech,* trans. Anna Bostock Berger (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), esp. part 1. Leroi-Gourhan's work forms the basis for Stiegler's own argument concerning the intrinsic correlation of the human and technology in *Technics and Time 1,* esp. pp. 134–79.

same submerged level as the emotions do in our daily lives. So, the two are actually well suited to each other" ("C," p. 199).[49] Viola's videos are not temporal objects, indeed cannot be temporal objects, precisely because they are so intimately conjoined with the flux of the living present, the very form of time in which life reposes.

Consider two examples from the *Passions* series, both diptychs composed of separate sequences of emotional transitions conjoined after the fact. In *Dolorosa* (2000), the suffering of a woman with long hair and a man with a goatee, contemporary analogs of the Virgin Mary and Christ, is shown in excruciating detail (fig. 9). As they separately cry, turn their heads, and open and close their eyes and mouths, the two appear to betray awareness of one another's proximate presence; yet, as Walsh points out, this was entirely unplanned, because they were shot as separate, stand-alone studies and Viola made no efforts to coordinate their movements even as he placed them together (see "E," p. 38). In *The Locked Garden* (2000), likewise comprised of two autonomous studies, a middle-aged man and woman progress through various emotional states (fig. 10). Noticing a homology between the two processes of these two separate studies—"all of a sudden," he has observed, "they became a dialogue" ("E," p. 39)—Viola decided to put them together as a diptych. In both of these cases, what is at issue is the mediation of the between—of a certain between-two of images, to return to our earlier discussion—in which the very distance separating the image from the spectator collapses: the "connecting entity [between the two] that is both inside and outside is *our* place in the diptych, the third element in the equation. In the larger sense, it is the creative potential in *all* images and relationships" ("C," p. 202).

What this means is that Viola's work operates an unreadable grammatization of life that can only be felt. In direct contrast to the cinematic grammatization of life proposed by Stiegler (anima is cinema, he cagily says), Viola's is a grammatization that breaks with the isomorphism of technical

49. Interestingly, Viola mentions the technique of high-speed film and the need for supersaturation of the image in conjunction with this correlation through time-form: "I . . . knew that the medium of video, master of the long take, was only capable of shooting the action at thirty frames per second, and I needed more visual increments of time to capture the subtlety of the transitions and transformations." He also notes the necessity to shoot scenes "as single takes with no editing": "the movement was created by the emotion itself, and the medium for this emotion, its constant base, was the person. Any kind of editing would disrupt this relationship" ("C," p. 200). Here, again, we can see the anticinematic dimension of his aesthetic, at least if we contrast it with Stiegler's definition of consciousness as cinematographic, that is, produced through selection (montage and editing) of extant, prerecorded material.

FIGURE 9. Bill Viola, *Dolorosa*, 2000 (color video diptych on two freestanding hinged LCD flat panels. 16″ x 24 1/2″ x 5 3/4″). Incidentally paired videos of a man and a woman capturing extreme states of suffering. From *Bill Viola*, p. 77.

FIGURE 10. Bill Viola, *The Locked Garden*, 2000 (color video diptych on two freestanding hinged LCD panels, 16″ x 25 3/4″ x 5 1/2″). Incidentally paired videos of a man and woman capturing the four primary emotions. From *Bill Viola*, p. 88.

and spectatorial synthesis that forms the core of Stiegler's position.[50] Here, rather than a neat correspondence between two syntheses, where the one conditions the other and vice versa, what we encounter is a radical divergence. Through their use of high-speed film and elimination of editing, Viola's videos might be said in fact to overgrammatize life, to capture it in a form that cannot be apprehended through normal perceptual means but only through the modality of affectivity that is life. In short, they bring us face to face with life and, in so doing, call forth our own vitality as the medium for experiencing life. In the process, moreover, they break the time barrier that until now has restricted media to the task of reproduction, for the life that Viola captures is not in real time but is, literally, faster than real time. Far from being the mere vehicle for a reproduction (writing, grammatization) of life, the technical contamination of living presence exposes the structural coupling of life with what Simondon calls the preindividual or metastable domain, which, we can now see, *is* the domain of the nonlived that forms the environment for life's continual (re)emergence. As an overwriting of life, the capture of a potentiality (the preindividual, affectivity) that exceeds the scope of perception and yet forms its very precondition, Viola's work shows life to be properly unrecordable, always in excess of, faster than, what can be inscribed and made available for repetition.[51] For this reason, the aesthetic that it exemplifies—the aesthetic of new media— can be characterized by the deployment of digital technologies toward a truly creative end, one that can be creative precisely because it causes to pass through the human (the spectatorial synthesis) that which is properly imperceptible and nonsynthesizable within the temporal range common to human perception and extant (analog) media forms.

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50. See Stiegler, "The Discrete Image." This isomorphism is an extension of the correlation of the flux of the temporal object and the flux of consciousness. "We must," Stiegler insists in his analysis of the digital image, "take into account *two* syntheses: one corresponds to the technical artifact in general, the other to the activity of the subject 'spontaneously' producing her 'mental images.'" In effect, this extension has the consequence of limiting the source of the spectator's affection to what gets (or can be) synthesized by the machine: "the spectator is affected, *in the very way* in which he synthesizes, by the photo-graphic image as receptacle of the silver effect without which the photographic noeme *would not take*" (ibid., p. 158).

51. Accordingly, it contrasts markedly with Stiegler's interpretation of the digital as a vehicle for the "critical analysis" of the image: "The analogical-numeric technology of images (just like that of sounds) opens the epoch of the analytic apprehension of the image-object. And because synthesis is double, the gain in new analytical capacities is also a gain in new synthetic capacities" (ibid., p. 159). Whereas this payoff remains limited because it flows from the technical analysis to the technico-subjective synthesis and not in the other direction, what Viola's work exploits is precisely the capacity of the digital to dissolve the image in a far more radical sense than simply decomposing it, to make the image and the technical analysis of the image into an instrument by which living presence transforms the very conditions of its own synthesis.

Bearing Witness to Life, or the Subject, Technically Expanded

Let us conclude by returning to the figure of the subject and asking once more how the technical expansion of self-affection bears on our understanding of it. In the wake of our analysis of Viola, this amounts to asking why it is through our encounter with affectivity, an encounter in which we literally allow ourselves to be affected by our own vitality, that we experience ourselves as subjects.

In his conceptualization of shame as subject, Giorgio Agamben correlates self-affection with physiological life (what he has called bare life) in a way that bears directly on the nexus of presence, affectivity, and life that has been our topic in this essay. For Agamben, shame, the experience of "being consigned to a passivity that cannot be assumed," can be likened to the experience of auto-affection that, from Kant onward, has furnished the originary structure of subjectivity.[52] While the general rationale here is the philosophical identification of auto-affection with time (that is, the very identification we have been exploring), for Agamben, following Kant (and Heidegger), there is a more specific reason: what Kant famously called the paradox of inner sense. In Kant's philosophy, time is the form of inner sense, but because time (like protention) has no manifold of its own, it must borrow its content from outer sense (the perception of objects in space). Inner sense, in a word, is constituted through a second-order reflection on the acts of outer sense, one that disregards their objective meaning in favor of their progressive ordering in time. For Agamben, the deep significance of this paradox is the fact that it requires us to "behave toward ourselves as passive" (quoted in *RA*, p. 109).[53] Passivity, Agamben continues, is not simply receptivity to an active external principle but "a receptivity to the second degree, a receptivity that experiences itself, that is moved by its own passivity." Shame "appears as the most proper emotive tonality of subjectivity" because it names the affective correlate of such second-degree receptivity; shame occurs when the human being is moved by—that is, *takes pleasure in*—its passivity (*RA*, p. 110).

In an effort to deepen Levinas's analysis of shame as being consigned to something from which we cannot take any distance, Agamben links it to life:

> To be ashamed means to be consigned to something that cannot be assumed. But what cannot be assumed is not something external. Rather, it originates in our own intimacy; it is what is most intimate in us (for example, our own physiological life). Here the "I" is thus overcome by

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52. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York, 1999), p. 110; hereafter abbreviated *RA*.

53. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1929).

> its own passivity, its ownmost sensibility; yet this expropriation and de-
> subjectification is also an extreme and irreducible presence of the "I" to
> itself. It is as if our consciousness collapsed and, seeking to flee in all di-
> rections, were simultaneously summoned by an irrefutable order to be
> present at its own defacement. . . . In shame, the subject thus has no
> other content than its own desubjectification; it becomes witness to its
> own disorder, its own oblivion as a subject. [*RA*, pp. 105–6]

In the experience of Viola's videos, what cannot be assumed is precisely the
protentional dimension of living presence. Because his videos broker an
encounter with the nonlived that lies at the very core of the *ecstasis* of living
presence, they put us in touch with a dimension of the living—affectivity,
the vital excess of the self over itself—that renders our perception passive.
That we react strongly to these works is a forceful indication of our en-
thrallment to this passivity, and if this enthrallment ultimately yields a
feeling of shame or disgust this would seem to demonstrate just how fun-
damental is our complex affective reaction, our self-affection by our own
affectivity, for our self-constitution as subjects. For, on this understanding,
we are subjects precisely because we are "out-of-phase" with ourselves; sub-
jectivity, in short, is a transductive relation (a relation that constitutes its
terms, in which neither term can precede the other because they exist only
in the relation) between affectivity and perception, between that in us which
exceeds us and that which seeks to capture it as content.[54]

   Yet, if Agamben's notion of shame at our own physiological life helps to
clarify why Viola's works catalyze such forceful reactions, that is, why the
confrontation with our own affectivity is so intolerable, it falls to the works
themselves to bring home exactly how our own vitality, that which is most
intimate in us, can become the agent of the shame that supports our con-
temporary experience of subjectivity. What they show us, or rather what
they compel us to feel, is our own indebtedness to time, to a future-to-come
that always comes as something nonlived in us that remains nonliveable by
us. Recalling Merleau-Ponty's critique of Heidegger—that the priority of
living presence renders *Entschlossenheit* inauthentic (see *PP*, p. 427; see also
n. 38)—we might understand Viola's accomplishment to be a philosophical
one. Shame is "'pure auto-affection' . . . a 'moving from itself toward . . .'
that is at the same time a 'looking back'" (quoted in *RA*, p. 110)[55] because

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54. I borrow the notion of being out-of-phase with oneself as well as the concept of
transduction from Simondon; see Simondon, *L'Individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (Grenoble,
1995); the introduction to this text is available in English; see note 29.

55. See Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics,* trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington, Ind.,
1990).

and only because time confronts living presence, the vitality that is most intimate in us, with its own absence, the empty form of a future to come that is the condition of possibility for its continuation. The subject is the residue of this transductive confrontation; far from being produced through a second-order receptivity, from the process whereby a human being takes its own desubjectification *as content,* subjectivity happens when a human being is brought face-to-face with its own constitutive incompleteness and when this encounter, this passivity in the face of oneself, becomes a source of pleasure or enthrallment. As the residue of shame in this sense, subjectivity simply is the condition of being consigned to life as something that cannot be assumed. Isn't this, after all, why we feel most alive at those moments when we are least contained, least sovereign over ourselves, and also why such vital feeling is often thoroughly saturated with, indeed inseparable from, a residue of shame?

That self-affection by one's own affectivity does not involve relation to a content becomes salient in the context of yet another work from the *Passions* series. In *Observance* (2002), Viola deploys the same package—single-take without editing, high-speed recording with normal speed playback—in a more complex configuration. Based on Dürer's *Four Apostles,* the work depicts eighteen brightly clad figures in a line who slowly move forward toward us. As they each pause briefly at the head of the line, overcome with emotion, they seem to be looking at some unknown object just outside the edge of the frame (fig. 11). The individual figures occasionally touch or exchange glances, seeking to comfort one another in what is clearly a time of profound collective grief (fig. 12). United in their common desire to pay respect to whatever lies at the front of the line, they each do so in isolation, after which they quickly move away in order to cede place to their compatriots. What is at stake here, as Walsh astutely observes, differs significantly from the earlier *Quintet* where there were "many emotions and no single point of focus"; here, by contrast, there is a commonality of emotional expression spread across a "sequence of powerful individual reactions" that converges on a shared object ("E," p. 55). In other words, here the intentionality of the affective self-affection of the spectator is directed outward; rather than doubling the intentionality of living presence and generating the internal splitting that yields shame, affective self-affection becomes free-floating, available to be attached to external, social events.

If *Observance* marks a break for Viola, that is precisely because it channels that most intimate feeling of vitality in a different, perhaps more affirmative, direction than shame—toward a collective experience rooted in the relinquishing of individual autonomy, of sovereignty over the self, in favor of

F I G U R E 11.   Bill Viola, *Observance*, 2002 (color high-definition video on plasma display, 47 1/2″ x 28 1/2″ x 4″). Slow-motion digital video depicting eighteen emotionally wrought figures taking turns observing some common offscreen object. From *Bill Viola*, p. 126.
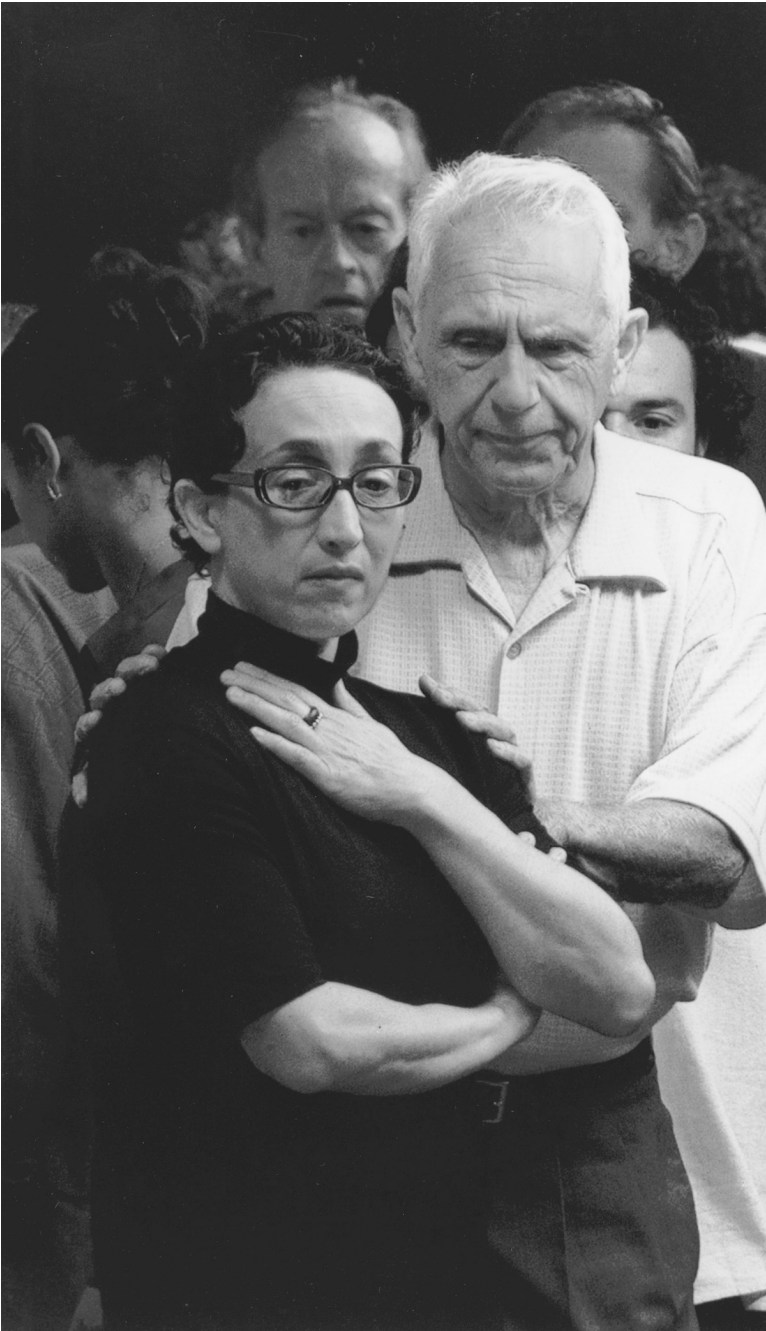
FIGURE 12.   Bill Viola, *Observance*. From *Bill Viola*, p. 127.

what Simondon would call a collective individuation.[56] When it is thus directed toward a common experience, in other words, this process of self-affection that would otherwise yield shame as its residue yields a transindividuation, a positive reverberation with the prevital force of others, that deploys the preindividual toward a different production than individual individuation. The transindividual, for Simondon, is not composed of a set of individuals, but designates a second individuation, a wholly different use of the force of preindividual reality; in it, what remains unresolved for the individual—the constitutive incompleteness of life that yields shame—finds a different, perhaps more positive, spiritual investment, one that arises from a profound resonance across individuals and against that in us which makes us seek to capture the constitutive excess of life, the prevital, the preindividual. The potential for such a positive investment is, in my opinion, the deep meaning of Peter Sellars's claim that Viola's work—*Observance* in particular—envisions a revitalized "culture of mourning." "In the face of certain of life's upheavals, in the face of certain acts of devastation," Sellars writes, "there must first be silence. There must be space, for healing, for the damaged tissue of life to regenerate itself. There must be time, for insight, for contemplation. There must be room for a grief that makes us more human, and a humility and a forgiveness taught by suffering that approaches the holy."[57] If Viola's newest work shows us the way toward a newly discovered potential within ourselves for mourning, this is, I submit, because it takes us beyond the subject as shame, turning this latter outward and harnessing the force it seeks to contain toward the forging of a different, collective investment.

56. See Simondon, *L'Individuation psychique et collective.*
57. Peter Sellars, "Bodies of Light," in *Bill Viola,* pp. 158–59.